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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, February 5, 1931.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Odd Jobs for February." Information approved by the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

Bulletins available: "Housecleaning Made Easier," and "Farm Home Conveniences."

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My Next Door Neighbor has a pet name for the month of February -- a good name, I think. She calls it "fix-it month," because she says that this peaceful winter period, when the holidays are well past and spring is still in the future, is the very best time to fix those little things about the house that will mean more comfort and convenience all the rest of the year, the odd jobs that have been put off from month to month because other more pressing duties have crowded in and taken up all the time.

Of all the months in the year, my neighbor says, February is the ideal one for doing inside jobs. It is a good time to refinish floors, make a new shade for the lamp, put up shelves, paint furniture, mend rugs and do all the thousand and one household tidbits that are so likely not to be touched at other busier seasons.

Fix-it month arrived so quickly this year that I hardly realized it was here until I looked at the calendar yesterday and to my horror realized that four days of it had gone by already. Though I was right in the midst of writing a letter at that time, I dropped my pen and went straight over to my neighbor's. We had agreed to plan our campaigns for house improvement together this February and I was afraid that she might have started her improvements already.

"Sit down," said my neighbor, "and have some tea, flavored by my own special method. I keep some orange peel in my tea cannister to give a faint orange flavor to the leaves and I hope you are enough of an Epicure to appreciate it."

"Please," I said, "don't tempt me with any delicacies. One week of this good month has almost escaped already and I haven't yet made one single plan for the fixing-up program. Since it's late, I'll have to concentrate on simple improvements for my house. I've been considering equipping some efficient supply drawers for various parts of the house. What I need just now is thoughts rather than food."

My neighbor passed me a cup of tea and said, "A few crips slices of cinnamon toast will do wonders in helping plan home improvements. Toast and tea, as the poet said, is ideal food for thought."

I took one piece of toast because it looked simply too good to pass by, but after that I firmly refused to be wheedled into another bite of anything or even another sip of tea. I knew how it would be if I allowed myself to indulge in more food. We would spend the afternoon chatting about club luncheons, spring suits, and Harry Jones' new wife and no telling what else and my improvement plans just wouldn't get underway.

"Well," said my neighbor, "since you will be so businesslike, we might start by exchanging ideas. Tell me about your plans and then I'll tell you about mine."

So I told her that for some time I had realized that one big need in our house was the centering or grouping of equipment of various sorts near the place where it was generally used. The idea of working centers had first appealed to me long ago when I read an article on efficiency engineering. I'm no engineer and I don't even pretend to understand engineering methods, but occasionally these efficiency experts suggest arrangements for factories and laboratories that I think might well be taken over into the home workshop. Many of their ideas are just common sense suggestions anyway -- the sort that most intelligent housewives have been using for years. Take the kitchen work center idea, for example. It doesn't take an efficiency engineer to tell an alert housewife that the utensils and other equipment regularly used at the sink should be centered conveniently near the sink; that knives, eggbeaters, spoons, bowls and measuring cups and other articles used at the work table should be kept close to the work table; and that still other utensils belong near the stove. Just ordinary, everyday common sense will dictate an arrangement like that for any kitchen. And there you have the idea of kitchen work centers in a nutshell. My plan is to carry this idea of centering equipment a little farther and apply it to drawers, cupboards and closets.

"So," I said, "if you want to know how I'm spending my extra time this month, I'll tell you that I'm organizing a series of convenient drawers -- a first-aid drawer for the bathroom, a stain removal drawer for the laundry, a metal polish drawer for the kitchen and a home carpenter's tool drawer for the back hall."

"Fine," said my neighbor. "And I'm concentrating on closets -- two cleaning closets, one upstairs and one downstairs, and convenient clothes closets in every bedroom. Let me show you the new cleaning closet that is my pride and joy."

She took me to the hallway just outside her kitchen and there opened a door on a shallow, built-in closet, beautifully arranged to hold a complete cleaning outfit. A top shelf held a pile of dust cloths and cleaning clothes, floor wax, steel wool, furniture polish, ammonia, soap and other cleaning supplies. Half of it was partitioned off into a tall space for the vacuum cleaner and for long-handled brushes, brooms and mops. These were all hanging in a neat row from the shelf above.

"Screw eyes fastened in the top of handles allow brooms, brushes and mops to be hung up so that the weight does not rest on straws, bristles or strings," said my neighbor.

On the other side of the partition a shelf and a shorter space beneath provided for short brushes, dust pans, basins and mop pails. The whole closet looked so neat and professional that this eternal job of cleaning suddenly seemed a much more interesting part of housework than ever before.

"I'm going to put in another closet like this upstairs," my neighbor told me. "That will save me from running up and down every time I need to dust or brush up a little on the second floor. And I'm going to try to put my cleaning tools away each time clean and ready for use. By the way, did you notice these little holes at the top and bottom of the closet door? They provide for ventilation. If brushes and mops happen to be put away a bit damp, this circulation of air will help dry them out and prevent mildew."

"Where did you get all these ideas?"

"They all came out of one of the bulletins I borrowed from your kitchen shelf. Just have a look on page six of the leaflet on housecleaning. There is a picture that suggested this cleaning closet. And the same bulletin suggested the next move on my program -- convenient clothes closets. Wait until next week or perhaps the week after, Aunt Sammy, and then I hope I can show you some clothes closets that will be the envy of the neighborhood. Modern clothes closets, Aunt Sammy, of the most attractive and useful kind. Dainty, gay closets that add to the scenery of the bedroom and also add to the life of the clothes by keeping them in such good condition."

When my neighbor finishes those closets, I'll tell you all about them. If they live up to expectations, my guess is that we'll all want to adopt my neighbor's ideas and rejuvenate our own wardrobes.

Now before I forget, let me tell you that the Menu Specialist has promised to make some menus for Valentine parties and I'll have those to tell you about next week.

Tomorrow: "Questions and a Sunday Dinner."

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